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Saved by the Dell

Leilani Farm Sanctuary takes in animals that had been abused or were doomed.

[By Cheryl Chee Tsutsumi](#)



Lehua the donkey welcomes two visitors with a kiss

Rescued farm animals find a home at the nonprofit sanctuary, which has 160 residents that are free to roam the grounds.

George came to Leilani Farm Sanctuary in Haiku, Maui, more than 100 pounds overweight from eating a daily diet of restaurant scraps. He was so heavy his belly dragged on the ground and thick rolls of fat covered his eyes.



Visitors gather around George, the blind pig, who was 100 pounds overweight until he was brought to Maui's Leilani Farm Sanctuary.

Thanks to carefully measured portions of healthy feed, George's weight dropped to normal, but his eyes had atrophied; the friendly, lovable pig is completely blind. Ironically, his paddock overlooks a spectacular panorama encompassing the ocean and a lush valley. It's the best view on the property.



Kids and adults enjoy meeting the sanctuary's donkeys, Jenny and Lehua. Chickens, pigs, goats and other animals share the 8-acre property.

Before she arrived at Leilani Farm Sanctuary, Lehua lived below a post-and-pier house in a dark crawl space that provided just enough headroom for her to stand. Her owners had acquired her as a novelty, gotten tired of her, and no longer were willing to put in the time and money for the care that she required.

Meanwhile, Jenny had sunk into a deep depression after her best friend, a horse, died. Inconsolable, she brayed constantly, day and night. Realizing she needed a new companion, her owners took her to the sanctuary where she met Lehua.

The two donkeys instantly bonded, and are now never more than a few feet from each other. They look identical; in fact, the only way to tell them apart is to note how they receive affection. Lehua likes kisses, but isn't fond of hugs. Jenny enjoys hugging, but doesn't like to be kissed.



A visitor pets Annie the goat.

Ned was born on a goat dairy farm. Because he can't produce milk, he was sold to people who planned to have him as the main course for a barbecue. They hogtied him and left him in the back seat of their car while they went shopping at a supermarket.

A man parked his car nearby and heard Ned crying. He walked over to see what the sound was, made eye contact with the goat and realized his awful fate. He decided to wait for the car's occupants to return, so he could talk them out of killing Ned.

Eventually, three men came to the car. They told the man they had just bought Ned and were going to slaughter him that weekend. The man begged them to reconsider, but they refused.

"He wound up buying Ned to save his life, and brought him here," said Laurelee Blanchard, founder of Leilani Farm Sanctuary. "Ned was our first goat. Although he's the biggest and has the most imposing horns, he's the gentlest of our goats."

Blanchard established the nonprofit sanctuary in March 2008 to provide care and shelter for rescued farm animals and educational opportunities for the community. It's named after its first donkey, which died that year.

"I envisioned a safe, beautiful, loving place where visitors could meet the animals and see them as individuals with distinct personalities," Blanchard said. "Our goal is to awaken compassion in people, so they look at the animals as something other than breakfast, lunch and dinner."

The sanctuary's 160 residents roam freely around the tree-shaded grounds and feast on seasonal fruit, including mango, orange, lychee, tangerine, starfruit, jackfruit and grapefruit. Cats, pigs, ducks, goats, rabbits, chickens, donkeys, tortoises and a deer coexist in perfect harmony. Every animal has a name and a story that tugs at the heartstrings. They came to the sanctuary orphaned, neglected, abused and/or abandoned. Some have physical deformities.



A young visitor helps feed the chickens. Laurelee Blanchard, owner of Leilani Farm Sanctuary, says chickens like affection and enjoy being cuddled.

Blanchard knows all the animals' names, backgrounds, quirks and even their voices. "Lehua and Jenny have different brays," she said. "We have 13 cats and if one of them meows, I know which one it is. I can also tell which goats are bleating and which chickens are clucking."

A former top-producing commercial real estate broker in Newport Beach, Calif., Blanchard was senior vice president of a firm with 15 offices nationwide. During her free time, she rescued homeless cats, arranged for them to be sterilized and placed them in good homes.

She spearheaded a three-year campaign that resulted in the implementation of a sterilization policy at the Orange County Animal Shelter to address overpopulation of cats and dogs. She also did pro bono work for the Farm Animal Reform Movement, which educates the public about large-scale "factory" breeding of animals for food.

"Over the years, I was spending less time doing real estate and more time doing animal advocacy," Blanchard said. "One morning I woke up and realized I needed to move away from a densely populated environment and live in a rural place where I could fulfill my dream of helping farm animals."



Laurelee Blanchard brushes Kea the pig.

Blanchard found the ideal location on a scouting trip to Maui in April 1999. The 8-acre property in rustic Haiku had large pastures, dozens of trees and enough rainfall to keep them green. She moved there three months later along with her 11 rescued cats, and paid for the construction of fences, paddocks, a barn and a 633-square-foot cottage. Her second-floor bedroom doubles as an office from which she can see animals out every window.

During twice-weekly 75-minute tours, Blanchard shares the story of Leilani Farm Sanctuary and its residents, including ducks that were born with malformed bills because they were inbred. "Their owner was going to slit their throats because he wanted to get rid of the defective gene," she said.

There are hens that were found crammed in a coop without food or water. "The person who had them relocated and didn't bother making arrangements for them," Blanchard said. "People are surprised to see that chickens love affection; you can hold and pet them just as you would a cat or dog."

Veronica the deer came to the sanctuary as a foal. Her mother had been killed by a hunter, who was bottle-feeding her with the intention of slaughtering her when she grew big enough.

"His neighbor begged him to let Veronica come here," Blanchard said. "By then, the hunter had bonded with her and didn't like the idea of killing her either, so he was happy to let us adopt her. She's 2 years old now, and has no fear of humans whatsoever. When I lead farm tours, she follows us the whole way."

Although much has been accomplished at the sanctuary, the to-do list is still long. Volunteers are planting a garden to achieve self-sufficiency and reduce food costs for the animals. Blanchard would like to add more perches and nesting boxes in the aviary. High on her wish list is clearing brush and installing fencing to expand the habitat.

Blanchard describes the work as "hard, but wonderful and meaningful." Her biggest reward is seeing once-mistreated animals thrive and enrich the lives of everyone who visits.

"Our guests benefit from humane education, which creates a culture of empathy, respect and concern for the well-being of animals," she said. "It's amazing how dramatically people's perspectives change

when they kiss a donkey, cuddle a chicken and give a pig a belly rub."

LEILANI FARM SANCTUARY

- » Address: 260 E. Kuiaha Road, Haiku, Maui
- » Tours: Wednesdays at 4 p.m. and Saturdays at 10 a.m.
- » Tax-deductible donation: \$20 per person is requested. Reservations are required.
- » Phone: 298-8544
- » Email: info@leilanifarmsanctuary.org
- » Website: www.leilanifarmsanctuary.org
- » Notes: Volunteers are needed to assist with various projects beginning at 9 a.m. on Mondays and Wednesdays. email to sign up.

The sanctuary operates solely on donations and the kokua of volunteers. Tax-deductible contributions are appreciated and can be made online or via check or money order made out to Leilani Farm Sanctuary and mailed in care of Laurelee Blanchard, 260 E. Kuiaha Road, Haiku, HI 96708.

Cheryl Chee Tsutsumi is a Honolulu-based freelance writer whose travel features for the Star-Advertiser have won several Society of American Travel Writers awards.